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AUTHOR Palladino, Dolores; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides vocational educators with a guide that they can follow as they plan their communications with legislators. The guide contains two parts. The first part explains the legislative branch of government and shows how an idea becomes a bill and then a law. The second part provides effective communication strategies that vocational educators can use as they express their views to legislators. These include personal visits, telephone calls, telegrams, and written correspondence. This part concludes with tips on (1) the important issues that should concern vocational educators, (2) whom to contact, and (3) when to communicate. (YLB)

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COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS

A GUIDE

PREPARED BY A SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE

FLORIDA VOCATIONAL ASSOCIATION'S GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dolores Palladino
Sunny Phillips
Barbara Pryor
Shirley Stacey

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Special Thanks to Ron Scull, FVA Executive Director, and Judy White Harris, FVA President (1987-1988), for their assistance with this guide.

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INTRODUCTION

The success of vocational education depends a great deal upon adequate federal, state, and local funding. It is the legislative branch of government that makes the decisions concerning this funding. Since the environment of federal finances is constantly changing, the legislators must make serious and difficult decisions each year as to which public groups will receive adequate funding for their programs. Therefore, it is essential that vocational educators fight for their fair share by contacting and influencing the legislators. However, in order for one's views to be successfully heard, proper communication techniques must be used.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide vocational educators with a guide instrument that they can follow as they plan their communications with legislators. The guide contains two parts. The first part explains the legislative branch of government and shows how an idea becomes a bill and then a law. In other words, it gives an understanding of the law-making process. The second part provides effective communication strategies that vocational educators can use as they express their views to legislators. By following these strategies vocational educators will be able to participate in the law-making process.

THE LAWMAKING PROCESS

Florida's constitution divides the governmental structure of the state into three separate and independent branches. These are the Legislative Branch, the Executive Branch, and the Judicial Branch.

The Legislative Branch has exclusive law-making power and determines the general policies by which the problems of society are to be met. It is in the Legislative Branch that we see government by the people at work. "All political power is inherent in the people" asserts the Declaration of Rights to Florida's Constitution, and the Legislature is an instrument through which the people exercise the power.

Florida's Legislature is composed of two houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The members of the houses are elected by the people during the general election in November of the even numbered years, with senators serving four-year terms and representatives serving two-year terms. Either house may initiate legislation on any subject but no law may be passed without both the Senate and the House agreeing upon its exact words.

The heart of the legislative process is the committee because the Legislature uses the committee system to convert ideas and needs into legislation. There are several kinds of committees but the main ones are standing committees, special or select committees, and subcommittees.

Each bill, introduced by a legislator, is assigned to a committee. The committee studies the bill, researches it, and may even hold public hearings where they listen to others who are interested in the bill. Then the committee votes to recommend the bill favorably, unfavorably, or favorably with amendments. The committee's recommendation is considered when the bill is debated on the floor of each house.

When the Senate and the House are unable to agree on the final content of a bill, it goes to a conference committee. This committee is composed of members of both houses, and it tries to resolve the differences between the Senate and the House versions of the bill. The conference committee report must be approved by both houses.

The flowchart on the next page shows the route a proposed bill takes as it passes through the Florida Legislature.

How An Idea Becomes A Law

CONCERNED CITIZEN
Legislator or group suggests legislation

REPRESENTATIVE
decides to introduce bill

BILL DRAFTING SERVICE
either writes bill or reviews for style

BILL FILED WITH CLERK
numbered, printed

FIRST "READING"
by publication in *Journal*
Speaker assigns to committee

COMMITTEE HEARINGS
Bill Reported,
1 favorably
2 favorably, with amendment
3 favorably, with committee substitute
4 unfavorably (killed)

CALENDAR
Rules Committee selects bills for Chamber consideration

CHAMBER SECOND READING
bill read for amendment

CHAMBER THIRD READING
bill debated, roll call vote on passage, if passed

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

deliver to SENATE SECRETARY

BILL READ FIRST TIME
President assigns to committee

COMMITTEE HEARINGS
Bill Reported,
1 favorably
2 favorably, with amendment
3 favorably, with committee substitute
4 unfavorably (killed)

SECOND READING
bill read for amendment

THIRD READING
bill debated, roll call vote on passage, if passed

SENATE

RETURNED TO HOUSE
without amendments
with amendments

HOUSE concurs
HOUSE refuses to concur

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE
HOUSE members
SENATE members
(majority of each must agree to report)

HOUSE and SENATE adopt conference report in its entirety, pass bill

TO ENROLLMENT
(as act)

TO GOVERNOR

signs act

approves without signature

vetoes

two-thirds vote in each house overrides veto

TO SECRETARY OF STATE

BECOMES EFFECTIVE
on 60th day after adjournment *sine die*
or
on specified date
or
upon Governor's signature

A simplified chart showing the route a bill takes through the Florida Legislature. Bills may originate in either House. This bill originated in the House of Representatives.

OFFICE OF THE CLERK
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

There are several methods that can be used when communicating with legislators. These include personal visits, telephone calls, telegrams, and written correspondence. Determination of the method of communication should be made based upon the nature of the issue and the circumstance under which the message must be conveyed. For example, if time is important, a telegram or phone call would be the most expedient means of communication. If the issue is highly technical, a personal visit or letter would be appropriate.

PERSONAL VISITS

A face-to-face meeting with your legislator (or the legislator's aide) can be a very effective way to transmit your views and concerns. Visits can be by an individual or collectively by a group. Group contact has several advantages. It conserves the legislator's time; it convenes those with a wide range of expertise; it has the capability of addressing numerous issues related to a bill; and it demonstrates a measure of cohesion and strength. Individual contacts are advantageous when the individual is highly respected by the legislator or aide as a leading authority on the issue.

Use the Visit

-to identify yourself as a vocational educator.
-to acquaint the legislator with your program.
-to acquaint the legislator with your personal views.
-to seek support for funding for your program.
-to demonstrate a 'mass lobbying' effort when several individuals go together.

Plan the visit

1. *Decide to go alone or in a group.*
2. *Plan your visit* when the legislator is most likely to be available.
3. *Time your visit* before the legislator's opinion has solidified or a public stand has been taken.
4. *Make an appointment.* Identify who you are, what your area of expertise is, what issue you want to discuss, and suggest dates and times. (Capital office visit — 10 minutes, district office visit — 30 minutes)
5. *Talk to an aide* if you can't see the legislator. (Aides are very important, and they are more accessible to you for follow up.)
6. *Confirm the appointment.* Schedules change, so confirm a day or two before.

Plan the Interview

1. *Do your homework* regarding pending legislation. Have background information, specific examples, and positions of other groups who support or oppose. It is very important to use bill numbers whenever possible.
2. *Appoint a spokesperson* if you are going with a group. Agree on which issues in vocational education to discuss and on the position to be presented.
3. *Praise the legislator.* Be aware of his or her past actions and comment on specific votes.
4. *Be brief, informal but specific, friendly,* and *to the point,*regarding your professional position. Keep so finely tuned that you consume only the allotted 10 to 30 minutes.
5. *Summarize major points* of discussion before ending the meeting.
6. *Give an invitation to the legislator* to visit or meet with your school members or professional organization.
7. *Leave some written material.* It should be a brief summary stating the key facts and issues.
8. *After the visit, send a letter of appreciation* for the legislator's time and support. Refer to any commitments agreed upon by the legislator in the meeting.
9. *Develop an on-going relationship* through additional phone calls, visits, and correspondence. This relationship should exist not only during the legislative session but should continue throughout the year.

TELEPHONE CALLS

Communicating by telephone is undoubtedly the quickest method for giving input on a pending bill. However, it is not always the most effective because it may not achieve direct communication with the legislator. Once the legislative session convenes, legislators' time is very limited. Your legislator may be "on the floor" and only his legislative aide will be available to speak with you.

When speaking to legislators' staff members, keep in mind that they, too, can be influential. Once you have explained your position on an issue and the legislative aide agrees with you, you will have established the most important link to your legislator. Legislative aides listen to constituents, and they listen well.

Whether speaking directly to a legislator or an aide on the telephone, there are several points to consider. One of these is the quality of your voice. When you talk on the telephone, the quality of your voice and the ability to express yourself clearly and concisely are very important. The person on the other end of the line can't see your facial expressions or gestures, and the impressions he receives must depend entirely on what he hears.

Besides the quality of your voice, there are other points to remember when using the telephone to communicate with legislators.

1. Identify yourself, the bill number, and state your opinion.
2. Keep it brief, stick to one issue, and be factual.
3. Keep on the tip of your tongue what you have to say. Say it promptly.
4. Write down the items you wish to discuss if there are several.
5. Have a positive, friendly attitude.
6. Be careful not to threaten or pretend to be a "wielder" of great power. These are hindrances.
7. Request specific action.

TELEGRAMS

Telegrams can also be an effective means of communicating your wishes to members of the state legislature or congress. They are especially important when the time is too short to allow for the delivery and reading of a formal letter.

In addition to regular telegrams, Western Union provides special rates for public reaction to legislative activities. The Western Union *Mailgram* allows for a public opinion message, and it is a perfect way of getting one's views to a legislator quickly and efficiently.

A *Mailgram* should be brief and to the point, and it should include the bill number to which you are referring. The following is a sample of a *Mailgram* sent by the president of a local vocational association at a time of crisis during the Carl Perkins legislation hearings.

To send a *Mailgram*, call toll free (800) 325-6000. The charge for the first 50 words is $10.75. Each additional set of 50 words is $2.95. It usually takes one day for delivery of a *Mailgram*.

MAILGRAM SERVICE CENTER
MIDDLETOWN, VA. 22645
26PM

Western Union Mailgram®

4-0649503086002 03/26/84 ICS IPMMTZZ CSP TPAB
1 8139222234 MGM TDMT SARASOTA FL 03-26 0735P EST

ZIP
SENATOR PAULA HAWKINS
U.S. SENATE
WASHINGTON DC 20510
I'M A VOCATIONAL EDUCATOR. I URGE YOU TO VOTE FOR S.2341, A BILL TO REAUTHORIZE THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ACT. THIS BILL WILL GET FEDERAL MONEY TO MY SCHOOL EFFICIENTLY. IT WILL HELP ME SERVE MY STUDENTS WHO NEED THE HELP THE MOST
MICHAEL CAVALIER PRESIDENT OF SARASOTA COUNTY VOCATIONAL AND ADULT ASSN

19:35 EST

WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

Writing a personal letter to a legislator is one of the best tools available for communication. It is a democratic right that gives us the chance to express our views to our elected officials, and our views can possibly affect the course of events that are happening. Letters assist legislators to measure their constituents' reactions to public issues. These letters can be a powerful force that help to determine legislative action. The greater the number of letters expressing the same view, the greater the influential power.

A well thought-out letter is given more weight in a legislator's office than a postcard, form letter, petition, telegram or telephone call. For this reason, it is a wise citizen who uses this means of correspondence for communicative purposes whenever the time frame allows for a letter-writing activity.

There is no guarantee that a personal letter will persuade a legislator to support a particular view but chances are excellent that the letter will have a definite impact if some strategy is used as the letter is written. The legislative staff members in an office read, screen, and respond to correspondence. They advise the legislator on the merits of letters. Therefore, it is important that some organized strategy be followed when writing to a state legislator or a member of Congress.

1. *Get to the point fast (first paragraph).* Identify yourself as a vocational educator and state the purpose of the letter. Be clear, brief, courteous, and factual. Discuss only one issue per letter and refer to the bill by number and name. Agree or disagree with an issue as strongly as you wish but once you have made your point, stay there. Stick to the point without any clutter of unrelated details.

2. *Emphasize facts (middle part of letter).* You have a right to your opinion but if your opinion is supported by facts, your letter is more likely to be acknowledged and heeded by legislators. State concisely the reasons for your opinion. How would the legislation affect vocational students? Support your arguments with facts and figures but do not exaggerate. Include newspaper and journal articles which are pertinent to the issue.

3. *Ask for action and support (last paragraph).* After you have made your point and supported it with facts, seek a commitment by asking for some definite action on the part of the legislator. Request a reply regarding the legislator's position. If the legislator is noncommittal, write again, but avoid any intimidation, threats, or pressure. When the legislator supports you, it is important to send a letter of appreciation for the position taken.

GUIDELINES FOR LETTER WRITING

The following guidelines will help make the task of writing a letter to a legislator fairly easy. The guidelines include:

1. A sample strategy form letter.
2. A sample of an effective letter.
3. Samples of opening paragraphs.
4. Samples of closing paragraphs.
5. A guided letter form.

STRATEGY FORM LETTER

Your Address .....

DATE .....

The Honorable .....
House of Representatives, or Senate
Office Address, If Available
Washington, D.C. (Zip Senate 20510)
(Zip House 20515)
Tallahassee, FL 32304

Dear Congressman/Congresswoman, Senator or Representative

Introduction
-Identify yourself.
-Brief reference to your occupation, business or organization.
-Refer to bill by name and number if appropriate.

Purpose of Letter
-Why are you writing?
-Give facts and/or to support your position.

Closing
-Request a reply indicating his/her position regarding the issue.
-Thank the legislator for his/her consideration of your position.

Sincerely,

472 Washington Avenue
Sarasota, Florida 34610
November 5, 1987

The Honorable John Smith
The U.S. Senate Office Building
SR-350 Greene Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

As a vocational educator in the field of .....
I have great concern for H.R. 3058--the FY 1988 Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations Bill. This bill is presently being considered in Congress, and I wish to express my support of the Senate's version of it.

Vocational education plays a major role in the American educational system by training the youth and adults of today for the jobs of tomorrow. With the increasing need for a highly-skilled work force, the importance of vocational education is now greater then ever. A qualified work force cannot be provided by local school systems without federal aid. Bill H.R. 3058 provides $942.45 million for vocational programs that provide training for more than 17 million youth and adults currently enrolled in vocational education. The Senate levels of the Bill provide significant increases for vocational education programs, which will allow for inflation and help continue the education of the American work force.

It is federal legislation that sets the tone for vocational education, and you have the power to be influential in this respect. As you conference on H.R. 3058, please stand firm on the Senate number for vocational education. I thank you for your attention to vocational issues because your support with vocational funding is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully yours,

Joan Q. Public

SAMPLES OF OPENING PARAGRAPHS

I work in the field of vocational education as a ..... and this letter is to urge you to vote for ..... The passage of this bill will provide the funds necessary to serve those vocational students who need help the most.

As one of your constituents, I wish to inform you of my views concerning ..... I strongly support this legislation because it will benefit vocational education by providing needed funds.

I am a vocational educator, and I wish to express my support for the vocational education bill/amendment presently at hand. This bill/amendment is crucial to provide the funds needed to maintain many vocational programs.

I am writing to inform you of my views concerning Bill ..... Since you are a supporter of vocational education, I know you are interested in your constituent's viewpoints.

I am writing to inform you of my legislative views concerning vocational education. I believe you are a dedicated hard-working legislator interested in your constituents' viewpoints.

This letter is to let you know how I feel about (the present legislation in) Or (the lack of legislative concern for) vocational education. I believe that every individual should be aware of legislative issues dealing with vocational education. You, as a legislator, have proven your dedication.

I am a vocational educator, and I have strong feelings concerning the ..... vocational bill. This letter is to share my views with you.

This letter is in reference to the Bill ..... which adversely or positively affects vocational education. I should like to express my thoughts concerning this bill.

I have great concern for vocational Bill ..... which is presently being considered in Congress. As a person working in vocational education, I wish to highlight (some of the important parts which will encourage support) OR (some of the parts which will be detrimental to vocational programs).

I understand that Bill ..... has cut drastically the funding for vocational education and that legislators are presently working on a compromise bill. Please consider carefully the needs of vocational education when this compromise bill comes up for a vote.

9

SAMPLES OF CLOSING PARAGRAPHS

You have been a consistent supporter of vocational education in the past, and your allegiance is greatly appreciated. I would be interested in knowing your position on this particular issue as I am hoping you will consider the above comments when you vote for the supportive bill.

I thank you for giving attention to my views, and I urge you to keep my comments in mind when you consider any measures relating to vocational issues.

Federal/State support in vocational education is of paramount importance in keeping vital programs in operation, and I ask you for your support in this dual relationship. I would appreciate a reply from you stating your position with this issue, and I thank you for your time in this matter.

The goal of vocational education is successful job placement, and the needs of the community for workers has increased considerably. We, in vocational education, are striving to meet these needs but if we are going to be hampered by lack of funding, then the community will suffer. Hopefully, you will be supportive on the legislative level. I thank you for your attention to vocational issues.

It is the federal/state legislation that sets the tone for vocational education, and you have the power to be influential in this respect. Your support of vocational funding will be greatly appreciated. Please reply to this letter by stating your position.

Changing technology has had tremendous effects on programs and has made changes in the nature of the work place. These changes in all the occupational areas cannot be addressed in local school systems without federal aid. In your role as legislator, you can be of great assistance by supporting vocational funding bills.

Quality education and a qualified work force are national/state interests, and the only way to have quality vocational programs is with federal/state money. I urge you to consider these factors when you vote for vocational issues. Thank you for allowing me to express my views on the matter.

Your work on committees for education have always shown a commitment to vocational education. I know you will continue to be supportive with the issues at hand, and I thank you for your support.

Your commitment to vocational education has been long-standing, and your constant support is greatly appreciated. We, in vocational education, feel that you will continue to support federal/state governments' responsibility with present issues in this vital area.

Vocational education is essential to our economic future because the pace of technological changes is depended upon the ability of the workers to adapt to ever-changing skill needs. Vocational programs need legislative support, and in this respect, you can be most helpful. Please consider these comments and state your position on vocational issues.

RETURN ADDRESS

STREET ADDRESS _____
CITY, STATE, ZIP _____
DATE _____

_____
_____
_____ (INSIDE ADDRESS)
_____

_____: SALUTATION

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CLOSING _____

SIGNATURE _____

WHAT ISSUES SHOULD CONCERN YOU, TO WHOM SHOULD YOU EXPRESS YOUR VIEWS, AND WHEN SHOULD YOU DO THIS ?

THE IMPORTANT ISSUES

The Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House publish a journal and a calendar daily during the legislative session. The journal details the proceedings on the floor, committee reports and related action of the previous day. The calendar is a schedule of business to be taken up that day and the next, including committee meetings and bills to be considered.

Lobbyists for vocational education have access to the journal and the calendar on a daily basis. The lobbyist in Florida is the Executive Director of the Florida Vocational Association, and it is this individual who is the key person to inform vocational educators of pertinent, pending legislation. Disseminating this information is important when "grassroots" assistance is needed to aid the FVA Executive Director in efforts to influence legislators.

Other important lobbyists for vocational education are the Executive Director of the American Vocational Association (AVA) and members of the Council on Vocational Education (COVE). These individuals, along with the FVA Director, often encourage vocational educators to express their views to legislators. Furthermore, they also provide the necessary information concerning the important bills (their number, their descriptions, the pros and cons of each, etc.).

Besides being directly informed by lobbyists, there are other means of obtaining information on pending legislation. Vocational journals, newsletters, and legislative booklets are also accessible to people interested in vocational education. These include:

- *Florida Vocational Journal*
- *Florida Vocational News*
- *Legislative Update-by FVA*
- *American Vocational Journal*
- *AVA ALERTS*
- *UPDATE-newspaper published by AVA*
- *COVE Legislative Brief*
- *Interim Calendar*-- lists all prefiled bills by subject, sponsor, committee meetings, and reports of committees. Anyone may be placed on the mailing list (No charge). Send your request to:
  Clerk, House of Representatives
  427 Capitol
  Tallahasee, Florida 32399-1300

You May Call the Legislature

If you want to know about a particular bill or issue before the legislature, call this toll free number... **1 (800) 342-1827**. Knowing the number of the bill will help you to get faster service.

WHOM TO CONTACT

Members of Congress and State Legislators who sit on key committees and subcommittees should receive first attention. However, one must be aware of the protocol involved in communicating with the lawmakers. For example, if the legislator on the committee holding jurisdiction over a bill is from another district or state, the vocational educator should contact the committee member through their own member of Congress or the State Legislature. These local legislators may be willing to write letters of support to the chairman of the commitee if they have heard from their constituents regarding the legislation of interest. Moreover, they, too, will be voting on the bill once it reaches the floor.

The Executive Director and the Legislative Committee of the Florida Vocational Association identify key members of Congress and state legislators in the state who can assist with legislation related to vocational education. This can be done on a regular basis (yearly) or periodically as the need arises. The information as to whom to contact can be disseminated to members of the state vocational association, local vocational association, and to vocational schools.

The mailing addresses of legislators can also be found in the *Clerk's Manual*. This is a small book containing pictures, addresses, and other personal information of all the representatives and senators in Florida. This is a public document, and it is published in January of each year. It can be purchased from:

Clerk, House of Representatives
427 Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1300

WHEN TO COMMUNICATE

Communicative efforts to influence legislators must be done in a timely manner in order to be effective. Although vocational educators should make contact with legislators as often as they are concerned about current issues, communications should especially be made at the time a bill is introduced and just before a vote is taken. It is also important to communicate before the legislator has taken a stand on the bill publicly.

In order to plan for exact timing, it is important to know when the national and state legislatures meet, what the important legislative proposals are, and when these proposals will be debated. Our vocational lobbyists (mainly the Executive Director of FVA and AVA) keep abreast of these details, and they will know when the time is right for communications.

Following the suggestions in this booklet, vocational educators will be prepared to communicate in an effective way. BUT REMEMBER--- whether you choose a personal visit, a telephone call, a telegram, or written correspondence to inform your legislator of your concerns:

1. Get to the point.
2. Emphasize facts and.
3. Ask for action or support.

Power comes from unity, and every vocational educator has a responsibility to become involved in the support of vocational education. Communicating with legislators is an effective means of support.

SPECIAL POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

When seeking help or support from a legislator, *make sure the issue is a legislative one*. If it is not, there is nothing the legislator can do about it.

Present all sides to an issue and then try to convince the legislator that your side is the best one. Sometimes the legislator won't know who is against what you want.

Whenever possible, *use business, industry, and citizens' groups* to help communicate. They can be influential.

Be sure the legislator realizes that your comments are YOUR VIEWS and not the views of your association. (Views expressed by an association must be endorsed by the association board.)